

"Clara's going to marry that Frenchman next month," she said, "and I shall be looking for another companion. Do you know of one?"

"I haven't another niece," he answered.

"Even if you had," she said, "I have come to the conclusion that I want something different. Will you listen to me patiently for a moment?"

"Yes."

"Will you marry me, please?" she said. "No, don't interrupt. I want there to be no misunderstandings this time. I don't care whether you are an invalid or not. I don't care whether you are going back into politics or not. I don't care whether we live here or in any other corner of the world. You can call yourself anything, from an anarchist to a Tory,—or be anything. You can have all your working men here to dinner in flannel shirts, if you like, and I'll play bowls with their wives on the lawn. Nothing matters but this one thing, Lawrence. Will you marry me—and try to care a little?"

"This is absolutely," Mannering declared, taking her into his arms, "the most brazen proceeding!"

"It's a good deal better than the bungle we made of it before," she murmured.